

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 27

NEWSWEEK
8 NOVEMBER 1982

PERISCOPE

Britain's Spy Case: Damage Control

Geoffrey Arthur Prime, suspected of being a "mole" inside British intelligence, may not have done as much damage to Western espionage operations as first feared. Prime worked as a Russian translator at Britain's Government Communications Headquarters at Cheltenham, one of the West's most important sources of covert information about the Soviet Union. But according to U.S. officials familiar with the case, Prime translated only intercepted plain-language communications. Because he did not handle decoded material, he would not have been able to tell Moscow which Soviet codes had been broken. He also could not have passed along keys to U.S. or NATO codes, because the encoding staff is strictly separated from other operations. In addition, U.S. sources say that Prime had a relatively low security clearance. Prime's principal value to Moscow probably would have been his ability to report which uncoded communications were being picked up. Moscow then would have been able to encode them, send them by different means or use them to transmit misleading information.

The CIA's Videotaped Evidence

The Central Intelligence Agency has demonstrated that it can learn from its mistakes. Last year a Nicaraguan captured in El Salvador said that he had been sent by Nicaragua to fight with the antigovernment guerrillas in El Salvador. But when the U.S. State Department presented him to reporters last March, he recanted, saying his admissions were coerced. Recently Honduras captured five Salvadoran guerrillas—at a secret base in Honduras—who said that they had been trained in Cuba. To avoid a replay of last year's embarrassment, the CIA videotaped their confessions.

ERIC GELMAN with bureau reports